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THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2016

## Baby lemur receives warm welcome Mosque welcomes community

Crowds meet Lawson the lemur at Ringtail Ranch and Rescue  
Page 2

Niagara Muslims celebrate holy month of Ramadan  
Page 3

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## Bullish for Bears



PORT COLBORNE HIGH/PHOTO

David Adamek, left, a coach and member of the Port Colborne High School faculty, and program leader Erin Bokma, flank some of the 2015-16 athletic award winners: Ryan Dendy, senior male; Jake Richard, junior male; Madison McAvoy, senior female; Hollie Sonnenberg, Blue Bear Award; and Allyce Andrews, junior female. See story on Page 8.

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# UPFRONT

## Warm welcome for baby lemur Lawson

MICHELLE ALLENBERG  
Postmedia Network

Ringtail Ranch and Rescue in Wainfleet introduced its newest addition to the family last Saturday.

Ranch owner Joni Cook had baby Lawson, a 14-week-old lemur, virtually attached to her hip as people crowded to see the little guy. The open houses last weekend were an opportunity for the public to meet Lawson, along with the other exotic rescue animals who call the ranch home.

"They are mostly cage-free, the ones that obviously aren't as friendly with strangers we have in cages. But we run a cage-free rescue," Cook said as Lawson sat on her shoulder with people trying to feed him.

She said the open house allows people in Niagara to see what they do at the ranch. She said there are a lot more exotic animals in the area than people might think.

The ranch works with the Ontario SPCA and private citizens to rescue and rehabilitate exotic animals that are given up or confiscated.

"Some of them come from zoos that have closed, some of them come from private collections. People have them, don't realize they aren't allowed to have them because of our bylaws. So they end up being confiscated," she said.

Unlike the other animals there, Lawson was born at the ranch. One of the lemurs that



MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Lawson, a 14-week-old ringtail lemur, takes a snack from a visitor during Ringtail Ranch and Rescue's open house.

was rescued from a zoo that closed gave birth at the ranch.

"She decided she didn't want to be mom, so she plopped him in the middle of the floor and took off," Cook said.

Lawson was taken into the care of Cook and is on his way to becoming a healthy adult lemur.

She said it isn't common for the lemurs in captivity to breed, and it is the first time they have had a baby lemur at the ranch.

"It is really exciting. Usually we wouldn't breed, but because the lemurs are so endangered and there are only so many left in the wild ... lemurs, if they breed, we are

actually happy about it," Cook said, as the little lemur hung playfully from her arm.

Although the ranch doesn't reintroduce animals into the wild, Cook said any healthy breeding can be a good thing for the future. It could help with bringing the numbers up or one day assist in repopulation

"There is no place for them to go back to in Madagascar. Ninety per cent of the rain forest is gone. They have slashed and burned it for agriculture, so there really isn't anywhere to send them back to right now," Cook said.

She said the ringtail lemur is the least-endangered of the various species, but all are

considered critical. The ringtail is the most adaptable of the nearly 100 different species.

"They have managed to move up into the mountains and change their diets so that they can survive a little bit better," she said.

MAllenberg@postmedia.com

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Mosque invites Niagara to celebrate Ramadan

ANDREA TINGEY  
Postmedia Network

Masjid An-Noor is inviting all members of the St. Catharines community to get a taste of Ramadan by fasting this month.

The month of Ramadan is the time when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. It is also a time of generosity as people are invited to donate to charity. The month of Ramadan runs from June 6 to July 6 this year.

The Mosque is hosting events Taste of Ramadan, where participants can break fast with the community, and Eid Buzz, where children can receive free haircuts.

"It's a very good time of spirituality and trying to be close to God," said former Masjid An-Noor Imam Moustaffa Khattab. "Fasting is also a way of showing gratitude to God for all of the good things he has given us."

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam and allows for Muslims to feel the hunger that the poor face. It is a solemn month that's dedicated to the revealing of the Qur'an for the first time, but also one of celebration. Every evening people invite others to break fast with them, and each Saturday there is a large meal at the mosque.

"Outside Ramadan it's a time when people are busy, so this is a good time to get together," said Khattab, who is now the Imam at Mississauga's Anatolia Islamic Centre. "It's also a time for getting together for prayer and charity."

"We call it 'Iftar,' breaking the fast," said Masjid An-Noor



DOO TINGEY/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Naïma Shire is running some events for Ramadan including Taste of Ramadan (a feast to break fast with the community) and Eid Buzz (a haircutting event).

President Ezeldin Ebadalla. "It's one of the beauties of Ramadan. We all share food. Whatever I have, whatever you have, we put them all together."

At the Taste of Ramadan

there will be a presentation about Ramadan and a breaking of the fast with other community members at the mosque. Community members are invited to fast that day, which will take place in

the third week of the month. Naïma Shire is the secretary of Masjid An-Noor board, which helps to plan the events that take place at the mosque.

"They get a taste of what Ramadan is and what we go

through when we're fasting during the day," said Shire, who said a date has not yet been set for the event.

The mosque is also hosting its first Eid Buzz, an event that allows for children to receive

free haircuts. This will take place the last day of Ramadan, July 6.

"We're opening it up for everyone to come to the mosque, get their kids ready for Eid and kind of have activities so they can have a fresh haircut for Eid," said Shire, noting that there is no religious significance to the haircut.

Muslims who can't fast either due to a chronic illness or pregnancy, for example, are invited to donate a meal to the hungry for each day they miss. Ramadan is considered the most sacred month in the Muslim calendar and charity is an important part of the holiday.

Ramadan culminates with a three day feast at the end of the month called Eid Al-Fitr, or Eid for short. According to Ebadalla, the mosque is planning on celebrating the holiday with an event at a local park.

"Just so that they feel the celebration and enjoy the spirit of Eid," he said.

Shire says every year, she can't wait for Ramadan to begin.

"People always wonder, 'why would you look forward to starving yourself the whole day?' That's not all Ramadan is. It's a time for the community to come together. It's time for you to be the best that you can be. All the bad habits you used to have, Ramadan is the time to break those bad habits and be a better person."

"You're not focused on not eating, you're focused on, what you can do to better yourself."

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# How to help your neighbour who is hurting

**PASTOR MICHAEL MELO**  
Faith & St. Peter's Lutheran Churches,  
Dumville & Port Colborne

**W**hen your friend, relative or neighbour is going through a tough time, often we don't know what to say. "I hope you feel better soon," "You won't go on grieving forever", and, "I'm sorry to hear that," don't seem to be enough, and depending on the situation, can seem shallow or rude. The Christian, however, has many great and comforting things to say because Christ took all suffering, sickness, loneliness, pain, sorrow and all sin into His own body and nailed them to the cross. He suffered them for all people of all time, and utterly defeated them in His all-atoning sacrifice on the cross. He is compassionate, completely understands all trials and tribulations, and is the only one who can give true peace, comfort and joy in the midst of them all because He knows them all personally, and has won the eternal victory over them.

The Christian can help those who are hurting with three levels of contact: Prayer, Conversation and Devotion.

1. Prayer. Include them in your prayers. Write a list of who you want to pray for, and, if the list is kept private, add specific topics or reasons why you are praying for them. Pray in your own way, but also use written prayers to add biblical content to your prayers (see Resources below). Read, pray and ponder the Psalms and other prayers in the bible (see Resources below) to focus your thoughts, to learn and grow in the knowledge of what God wants you to pray for and in what ways He has promised to help. Tell them you are including them in your prayers. "I'm praying for you." "I'm keeping you in my prayers." "I am praying that God gives you strength to trust in Him and give you comfort/peace/healing..."

You say you don't know how to pray, or your prayers tend to get repetitive, or are too self-centred? If you know the traditional and ancient Collect form of prayer, you can adapt it to any situation. It has five parts: 1. (Name and describe God), 2. (Describe what He has done - optional), 3. (Ask for something and/or thank Him), 4. (Give a reason - optional), 5. (Close in the name of the Trinity). Example (the Church's Collect for Ash Wednesday): 1. Almighty and everlasting God, 2. Because You have nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent, 3. Create in us new and contrite hearts, 4. That we, worthily repenting our sins and acknowledging our wickedness, may obtain from You, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; 5. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



MAX ROSSI/REUTERS

Cardinal Agostino Vallini holds a cross as Pope Francis leads the "Via Crucis" (Way of the Cross) procession, which commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at the Colosseum in Rome.

Amen.

2. Conversation. Talk to them and be a good listener. Don't be too quick to speak even if you have many comforting things ready to say. Simply being with someone who is hurting comforts them. Try to put yourself in their position. Ask yourself what would be comforting or helpful for you to hear or to be done for you. Offer to help them, if you are able and if it is appropriate (mow lawns, cook, babysit, drive them to appointments, etc.). Invite them to church where Christ will speak to them and comfort them most directly.

Ask if it's ok for your pastor to visit them if they don't have a pastor of their own. Encourage them to go to their church. Ask if

their pastor has visited, and if not, ask if you can call him.

Try to find a point of contact to continue the conversation. If they are related to you, that's easy, but if you don't know them very well look for clues about what is important to them in their life (children, sports, work, etc.). For example, if you know their family is one of the most important things in their life, ask them about their family, learn about joys and sorrows, and later this may be used as a doorway in to presenting the comforting Gospel, "Your children are important to you. You are a child of God and He cares for you. You know how you love them; imagine how much greater and more powerful is the love of

God for His children." Then you can explain briefly or at length, how God does this. Ask them if they would mind if you would read the bible and pray with them.

3. Devotion. Read the Scriptures, hymns and devotions to them, and pray with them. Use whichever resources you believe to be appropriate for the situation. Get to know the resources available and use them in your own devotional reading. Don't get overwhelmed by trying to do too much all at once. Keep it short and simple to start with. If you have a hard time reading for whatever reason, you can ask them to read a devotion, bible passage and/or prayer to you. Have a short prayer ready to pray if the opportunity presents itself.

Especially when visiting the sick or dying in the hospital, plan a specific format for your devotional reading and prayers. If you have time and are comfortable reading for more than ten minutes, use Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer from the hymnal (see Resources below) as the framework in which you read the Scriptures, devotions and prayers. When keeping the devotional time under ten minutes, read a passage of Scripture, a devotional reading and a prayer or two. Always be ready to add to those as seems appropriate. When you are finished, ask if they would like you to read another passage of Scripture and/or pray more with them. Always include the Lord's Prayer. Sing a hymn if you're able. Often include "according to Your will, O Lord." In your prayers, this focuses attention on God as the one in control of our life, our suffering and our death, and that He is good and gracious and has our best interests in mind and does everything for our benefit and the benefit of those around us. Often include the Apostles' Creed. Don't be afraid to stop for a drink of water, to answer their questions, to sit with them, and to cry with them. You may not know exactly how they feel or what they're going through, but Jesus certainly does. Tell them that. It can be a refreshing note of comfort to them as well.

Resources: Bible (the other resources will give you specific suggestions of what to read in the bible).

Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action by Matthew C. Harrison (Concordia Publishing House - all the resources on this publisher), Lutheran Service Book (CPI 2006); contains many hymns, prayers, prayer services, Psalms and more), John Gerhard's Manual of Comfort: Especially for the Suffering II, Meditations on Divine Mercy by Johann Gerhard. Good News Magazine issue on Suffering. These resources are the best I've found. Help be with you as you pray for and help those in need. Peace and comfort from Christ our merciful Saviour.

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# Leading Lynx lauded

**BERND FRANK**  
Postmedia network

Outstanding graduating athletes, top junior athletes and "rising stars" who excelled in sports in their first year of high school were honoured last Wednesday at école secondaire catholique Jean Vanier in Welland.

Niagara's French-language Catholic high school, which draws students from throughout the region, also sang the praises of unsung heroes, lauded the contributions of volunteers and recognized student athletes who were equally successful in the classroom as they were in sports at its 2015-16 athletic assembly.

Provincial gold medals in girls basketball and girls soccer highlighted team sports at Vanier this school year.

Following are the recipients of school and team awards:

## SCHOOL AWARDS

**Athlete of the year, senior**

**boys:** Jordan Cosco  
**Athlete of the year, senior girls:** Natasha Desjardins

**Athlete of the year, junior boys:** Liam Pouliot

**Athlete of the year, junior girls:** Alexandra Hebert  
**Aurel Gervais Memorial Rising Star Award, Grade 9 boys:** Max Blanchard  
**Aurel Gervais Memorial Rising Star Award, Grade 9 girls:** Keturah Balabyekubko

**Sports Academic Award, senior boys:** Nicholas Panoshy, 89.8 per cent

**Sports Academic Award, senior girls:** Sophie Vallancourt, 92 per cent

**Sports Academic Award, junior boys:** Ian Hauber, 95.9 per cent

**Sports Academic Award, junior girls:** Matteya Wendling, 96.9 per cent

**Jean Chartrand Leadership in Sports Award, boys:** Jordan Cosco

**Jean Chartrand Leadership in Sports Award, girls:** Natasha Desjardins  
**Outstanding Teammate**

**Award, boys:** Jordan Cosco  
**Outstanding Teammate Award, girls:** Natasha Desjardins

**Lynx Award:** Jordan Cosco, Shanelle Olah

**Jocelyne Clutterbuck Award, work ethic:** Natasha Desjardins

**Alphonse Touzin Award, devotion to sports:** Liam Dillon

**Coaches Recognition Award, individual:** Asha Balogh, swimming

**Coaches Recognition Award, team:** senior girls basketball, senior girls soccer

**Most improved athlete, senior boys:** Daymoin Costello, basketball

**Most improved athlete, senior girls:** Sophie Vallancourt, basketball

**Most improved athlete, junior boys:** D'Andre MacDonald, volleyball

**Most improved athlete, junior girls:** Matteya Wendling, basketball, volleyball

*Continued on next page*



**BERND FRANK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK**

Natasha Desjardins, senior female, front row, from left, Jordan Cosco, senior male; back row, Liam Pouliot, junior male; Alexandra Hebert, junior female; Keturah Balabyekubko, rising star, female; and Max Blanchard, rising star, male; are the 2015-16 athletes of the year at école secondaire Catholique Jean Vanier in Welland.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Leading Lynx lauded

From previous page

**Unsung Hero Award:** Dallas McKee, senior boys; Kyara Wendling, senior girls; Lucas Lidster, junior boys; Lindsay Lamarre, junior girls

**Fair Play Award:** John Lidster, senior boys; Natasha Desjardins, senior girls; Luc Grenier, junior boys; Julia McPhail, junior girls

**Volunteer In Sport Award:** Benis Miakanda, boys; Audrey Mulse, girls  
**Gerry Holmes Award, fan of the year:** Benis Miakanda

**Colin Hood Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations Award, student:** Jerry Briggs, Sydney Stusarz

**Colin Hood Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations Award, staff member:** Justin Boucher

### TEAM AWARDS

**Alpine skiing:** Lukas White, most valuable

**Badminton, midjet:** Max Blanchard, MVP

**Badminton, junior:** Jamie Schmidt, MVP

**Badminton, senior:** Alex Clafione, MVP

**Baseball:** Dallas McKee, MVP

**Basketball, senior boys:** Liam Dillon, MVP

**Basketball, senior girls:** Michelle Riganelli, MVP

**Basketball, junior boys:** Jacob

Labonte, MVP

**Basketball, junior girls:** Alexandra Hebert, MVP

**Cross country:** Simon Veillette, most valuable

**Curling:** Rachel Lynds, most valuable

**Hockey, boys:** Karl Lavoie, MVP

**Hockey, girls:** Matteya Wendling, MVP

**Rowing, boys:** Olen Noel, most valuable

**Rowing, girls:** Jasmine Lehta, most valuable

**Snowboarding:** Lukas White, most valuable

**Soccer, boys:** Jeremy Briggs, MVP

**Soccer, girls:** Natasha Desjardins, Kendal Dunn, MVPs

**Swimming, boys:** Colin Landon, most valuable

**Swimming, girls:** Makayla Cassolato, most valuable

**Volleyball, senior boys:** Jordan Cosco, MVP

**Volleyball, senior girls:** Natasha Desjardins, MVP

**Volleyball, junior boys:** Stephen Legagneur, MVP

**Volleyball, junior girls:** Lindsay Lamarre, MVP

**Wrestling:** John Lidster, most valuable

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# Bullish for Blue Bears

**BERND FRANK**  
Postmedia Network

So much for hibernation. There were Blue Bear sightings aplenty in the winners circle when Port Colborne High School celebrated the end to 2015-16 athletic season.

School and team awards were presented at an assembly, and student athletes also got together for a barbecue.

## SCHOOL AWARDS

**Athlete of the year, senior boys:** Ryan Dendy  
**Athlete of the year, senior girls:** Madison McAvoy  
**Athlete of the year, junior boys:** Jake Richard  
**Athlete of the year, junior girls:** Alyce Andrews

**Sportsperson of the year, senior boys:** Eric Hang  
**Sportsperson of the year, senior girls:** Sencia

Lampman

**Sportsperson of the year, junior boys:** Bruce Bryan  
**Sportsperson of the year, junior girls:** Jennifer Kozelj  
**Blue Bear Award:** Hollie Sonnenberg

## TEAM AWARDS

**Badminton:** Bruce Bryan, Victoria Fraser, Coaches Award  
**Basketball, senior boys:** Christopher Fairman,

Ethan Scott, MVPs

**Basketball, senior girls:** Meghan Kapellas, Mae Lannon, Madison McAvoy, Coaches Award  
**Basketball, junior boys:** Mitchell Sider, Mark Youngblut, Coaches Award

**Basketball, junior girls:** Jennifer Kozelj, Sydney Vrbanac, MVPs  
**Cross country:** Flynn Thornton, most improved; Dean Miller, most dedicated

**Hockey, boys:** Joe Bucioli, MVP

**Soccer, boys:** Connor Buchanan, Dakota Marko, MVPs

**Soccer, girls:** Jennifer Kozelj, MVP; Meghan Kapellas, Coaches Award  
**Softball, girls:** Alexandra Campbell, Madison McCullough, MVPs

**Tennis:** Carl Booker, Laryn Youngblut, Coaches Award  
**Track and field:** Ryan Dendy, MVP

**Ultimate:** Eric Hang,

Zack Piazza, Coaches Award

**Volleyball, senior boys:** Jacob Minor, MVP; Ryan Dendy, Tye Miller, Coaches Award

**Volleyball, senior girls:** Lydia Rehman, MVP; Madison McAvoy, Coaches Award  
**Volleyball, junior boys:** Brady Young, Coaches Award

**Volleyball, junior girls:** Allyce Andrews, MVP

df@frank@postmedia.com

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# Mental health workers partner with police

**BILL SAUWIK**  
Postmedia Network

Brandy Sand's first night on the street was a tough one.

On July 2, the social worker wrapped herself in a bullet-proof vest and started her initial shift.

She was teamed with a Niagara Regional Police officer as part of what is known as the NRP's mobile crisis rapid response team.

That night ended with two NRP officers suffering gun wound wounds in rural Pulten. One of the officers was shot through the neck and was lucky to survive.

She wasn't part of the call. It wasn't in her coverage zone.

However, the cops were dispatched to assist a man with mental health issues — and that's her specialty.

"The reality hit me that I'm in a cruiser with front-line officers, and there is the potential for danger, but I am here to help," said Sand, the crisis response team leader. "I'm here to help officers identify the signs, symptoms and behaviours of people in mental distress — and to prevent anyone getting hurt."

The response team sends mental health professionals along on 911 with Niagara Regional Police officers. It is a new program in Niagara that is approaching its first anniversary.

"The reality is police officers don't go to the Ontario Police College to become mental health workers," Sand said. "They get very little education in that aspect. They come out and expect to hit the road and start fighting crime, but find themselves on calls that have nothing to do with the criminal justice system."

She said when she first arrives at a scene, she is often mistaken for a police officer.

She wears a dark blue uniform and a Kevlar vest with a two-way radio slung across her shoulder. At a quick glance, the only difference is her vest, which says MCRRT. Her partner's is emblazoned with POLICE. Of course, she

## THE NRP'S NEW MOBILE CRISIS RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

**What happens:** One social worker, seven days a week, from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m., responds in a cruiser to mental health calls with an NRP officer.

**Team members:** Two full-time social workers and five relief workers.

**Who pays:** The Local Health Integration Network pays the social workers.

**Average response time:** 7 minutes, 38 seconds

**Connections to mental health services:** 357

**Divisions from hospital:** 379 out of 540 contacts

**Where:** Program only runs in St. Catharines, though there are efforts underway to acquire more funding and expand it across the region. MCRRT starts are from July to March 31

doesn't carry a Glock.

"We see the benefits of the program every day," Sand said. "We've had more successes than challenges, that's for sure."

"We had a call where a gentleman had knives in his car. He was under the influence and suicidal. I was able to negotiate with him to keep him safe until the police were able to show up and in apprehend him."

"The officer and I have different strengths. Sometimes the officer's uniform de-escalates things, like when you are dealing with a defiant youth."

"Other times — like when you have a situation with a battered woman — I can use my approach."

Police Chief Jeff McGuire gets a duty officer's report twice a day detailing police activities over a 12-hour period. There are men-

tal health calls or suicide attempts on just about every one.

From July to March 31, the program diverted 379 people from the hospital out of a total of 540 contacts in St. Catharines, said Kelly Falconer of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Niagara branch. Before the program started, they would have ended up in the emergency room.

She oversees the social worker component of the team.

"One of the bigger things that isn't identified in the stats is how we have seen officers change their perspective," she said. "They are starting to identify the person not as a perpetrator of a crime, but as somebody who is in crisis and needs help."

She said the police have become much more open to using community-based services such as Safe Beds and urgent support programs.

"We weren't sure of how front-line officers were going to react," Falconer said. "We thought they might think of us as a pain in the butt. That is not what happened at all. They have been receptive to feedback and welcoming. It is a good partnership."

While there are cities in Canada that have social workers meet police at the scene, Hamilton was the first police service in Canada to allow the workers to ride in the car with officers. Niagara used that program as a template.

"The advantage of this program is that the police can't really put the call on hold and sit around waiting for someone to show up," Falconer said. "The officers have to start dealing with the call the second they get there."

McGuire wants to see the program expand across Niagara. It runs only in St. Catharines, though the specially trained social workers

## FIVE OBJECTIVES FOR THE MCRRT PROGRAM

1. Decrease amount of time individuals in crisis have to wait to be connected to a mental health worker.
2. Divert where appropriate, from the hospital and criminal justice system.
3. Decrease the number of mental health call apprehensions.
4. Increase community connections for individuals in crisis.
5. Develop police capacity to respond to mental health calls.

and officers act as resources for officers in other areas, who can reach them by cellphone.

The program doesn't cost the police anything. The Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) picks up the tab for the social workers.

From the police side, uniformed officers aren't making as many trips to the St. Catharines hospital, where they must spend time cooling their heels in the emergency room waiting for the hospital to assess and take responsibility for the patients.

By mandate, the officers can't leave until that happens.

"We have drastically reduced the number of people who get apprehended," McGuire said. "When it is just police officers responding, they don't have a lot of choices. If it gets to the point where they feel the person needs to go somewhere, all they used to have was apprehension."

"When the MCRRT team



**JULIE JOCSAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK**

Carlye Myers, a Candian Mental Health Association worker, rides with Niagara Regional Police Const. Dan Dupuis to assist with calls that involve people suffering from mental health issues.

gets a call, the mental health worker has full access to the database. It may be someone we have dealt with many times. She can go in there and get the information and assess the situation.

"The person may not have to be apprehended. Often the social worker can guide the person to the right agencies and get the assistance he or she needs. They also arrange a follow-up the next day."

McGuire said there have been times when the NRP has had as many as eight officers stuck at the hospital on mental health calls.

"In Niagara, every per-

son we apprehend under the Mental Health Act has to come to St. Catharines," McGuire explained. "Take, for instance, someone from Fort Erie. We have a small detachment there. If the call happens in the middle of the night, the officer has to drive from Fort Erie and stay in St. Catharines."

"If we lose too many officers, we have to bring in more on overtime to fill in."

"The program is good for the police — and it is good for the individuals in the community."

**Continued on Page 20**

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# LOCAL NEWS

## IceDogs have new home at safety village

BERND FRANK  
Postmedia Network

For construction students at Welland Centennial Secondary School, Niagara Children's Safety Village is like a refrigerator door in a proud family's kitchen, only a lot bigger and much more permanent.

What could be a better place to display proof of a completed project for all to see than on the project itself? No matter what a sibling does in school or in sports afterwards, there's no way that A-plus essay or first-place ribbon is going to hide one of the buildings in the safety village from view.

In the past nine years senior students in the school's specialist high skills major program have designed and constructed five buildings in the miniature world in Welland where pupils go to learn about safety in the real world.

Latest addition to this friendliest of neighbourhoods — a combination old-fashioned, barn-like arena and a convenience store, situated on a corner naturally — was welcomed at a ribbon-cutting last Monday afternoon. Representatives of sponsors — Avondale, Crime Stoppers and the Niagara IceDogs — used scissors to slice through yellow police caution tape to

mark the occasion.

It was suggested to IceDogs co-owner Denise Burke that a hockey stick would have been an appropriate cutting tool — just think of the tape as the London Knights, "and go from there," she was told — but an injury suffered slicing avocados limited her to her right hand.

"What we need is a safety village for adults," Burke said with a laugh, raising her bandaged left arm into the air for emphasis.

She congratulated Centennial teachers Dave Colonic and Kevin Krasnay and 16 students for a finished product that matched the design the Ontario Hockey League team had in mind when it offered to sponsor a building at the safety village. Burke said while the barn-like structure required roof trusses, a first for the students, there was no hesitation at all on the part of the high school.

"There were no raised eyebrows or eye-rolling. They just took the idea and ran with it," she said. "They were wonderful."

Students needed about 24 hours in the classroom designing and constructing six sections from supplied materials. After Seranni Construction of Welland "floated the sections" to the site on large



BERND FRANK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

From left, Ernie Sibbett, Crime Stoppers vice-chairman; Diana Ferguson, Crime Stoppers administrative director; Holly Stewart, Avondale community relations director; Denise Burke, Niagara IceDogs co-owner; and Frank Stewart, Avondale business development manager; cut a strip of police caution tape to officially open a combination arena and convenience store, the newest addition to the Niagara Children's Safety Village in Welland.

trucks, the students — 12 in Grade 12, two in Grade 11 — spent parts of eight days piecing the parts together, much of the time working side-by-side with owners of the construction companies involved in the project.

"The contractors all take our co-op students on a regular basis," said Krasnay, the construction teacher at Centennial.

A chance to make a good

impression in hopes of landing a placement and, further down the road, a job isn't the thing students are getting out from making the safety village their refrigerator door.

"It's a great experience to give back to the community, and they have the opportunity to give back even before they go into the workforce," he said.

Krasnay said some of the students involved in the lat-

est building visited the safety village when they were in elementary school.

"One day their children will be going as well," he said.

In his remarks, Niagara College president Dan Patterson pointed out the safety village is one of only nine in the province.

"This is an incredible example of community partnerships," he said. "We're delighted it's on our campus." Developing partnerships is

ongoing, thanks in part to the children who visit through out the school year. Executive director Shirley Cordner pointed out because many employees at the Lowe's in Niagara Falls have elementary school-age children, the store raised more than \$10,000 in March and sent a "work party" to clean up after vandals damaged sections of the village.

"Our year did not start off very well, with all of our vandalism. Then, we have a day like today," Cordner said. The day got better when Ross Seranni said his construction company will donate concrete for the pads on which an ambulance and school bus damaged in the vandalism will sit.

Gabmar Homes, Hachey's Roofing, HD Construction, Regional Glass and Mirror, Rona Welland and Timberfield Roof Truss were community partners involved with the latest build, as was Seranni Construction.

Centennial-built storefronts at the safety village include a schoolhouse, based on the design of Niagara's first school at St. Johns, a Durdward Jones Barkwell accountants office, Welland-Pelham Chamber of Commerce office as well as Senway Mail.

Bfranke@postmedia.com

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Making new connections through the data portal

TONY RICCIOTTO  
Postmedia Network

It's free information that can prove helpful for anyone who is in business, a student doing research at school, or residents who want to know more about anything from road networks to heritage properties.

The Niagara Open Data Portal was launched two weeks ago by Niagara Region. A demonstration of the portal's capabilities was shown to the media and invited guests by members of the project team. A learn@lunch session, hosted by Innovate Niagara, was held at the Niagara Falls History Museum on Ferry Street in Niagara Falls.

Connie McCutcheon, senior business analyst, Niagara Region, said it's data that hasn't traditionally been available.

"The open data movement is a worldwide movement where governments across the world are feeling their data," said McCutcheon. "What's unique about this project is that it's not just governments, it's all of us that are partners and are working together to provide data to the community and put it in the hands of people."

The portal currently hosts 191 sets of data, contributed by Town of Grimsby, Town of Lincoln, Niagara Connects, Niagara Region, Brock University and the cities of Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland.

"If anyone has data about Niagara they are welcome to share it on our portal," said McCutcheon. "If you look at one data set it gives you one picture, but when you start to layer two or three data sets together you start to get a whole new picture of what you may have had before. Now that this data is available, we can all benefit. You can take data from Niagara Falls, add data from St. Catharines and Welland and get a different picture that no one had the ability to easily put together before."

Regional Chairman Alan Caslin said Niagara is taking a collaborative approach to building economic prosperity through the launch of the open data portal.

"When governments, businesses, non-profits and educational institutions come together to share data and resources, all of Niagara benefits," said Caslin. "The portal will open up data sets that provide real value and improved fact-based decision making to Niagara's small business and educational communities."

Mary Willey, executive director of Niagara Connects, said sometimes people don't have data or they don't know how to use it.

This information is another tool in their toolbox that can be used when it's time for stronger planning and making decisions for a stronger Niagara.

"This can be used for doing research for

themselves or their organization. Someone can take two or three of the data sets and maybe come up with a new app," said Willey. "Instead of making decisions the same old way, just because that's the way we have always done it, we can look at information, marry it up with what we know, and maybe we can come up with an action plan that will allow for stronger outcomes or whatever our goals might be."

Robert Lytle, founder of Redfied, runs a company in St. Catharines that specializes in the gathering of data and analyzing it so that businesses can make better decisions.

"If I wanted to start a flower shop I would want to know where my customers are going to be," said Lytle. "We look at data to see what it tells us. Data tells a story. Before, you had to pay for a lot of this information or hire somebody for a market study. Today, the information is available, but you have to know how to get it."

Lytle said for someone who is trying to run a small business, this type of information is valuable because the data can be downloaded for free, and by using tools like Microsoft Excel or other things that are available on the Internet, an owner can make their own assessment.

The data sets on the portal are downloadable and viewable in graphic and map formats.

The portal is at [www.NiagaraOpenData.ca](http://www.NiagaraOpenData.ca).

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Niagara reacts to municipal election changes



Dean Iorlida

**RAY SPITERI  
and MARVIANNE FIRTH**  
Postmedia News

Municipal clerks across Niagara are trying to wrap their heads around legislation passed last Tuesday by the provincial government that changes how civic elections will and could be held in the future.

Niagara Falls city clerk Dean Iorlida said he doesn't think allowing municipalities the option of using ranked ballots starting in 2018 makes sense for the Honeycomb Capital.

"In Niagara Falls, with our at-large system, although sometimes we're criticized for having 30 candidates on the city council slate, I think that does provide the electorate with a fair amount of choice," he said.

"They're not ranking their preferences one to eight, but they certainly have a lot of choice in that scenario."

"Implementing a ranked-

ballot system with an at-large system like that just boggles my mind and I think you'd have to be a doctorate in statistics to kind of figure that out."

Iorlida said sometimes the municipality faces problems with people not filling out a ballot correctly.

"Trying to explain how to rank your choices is a pretty big task," he said.

Ranked ballots allow voters to number candidates in order of preference, potentially first, second and third, instead of voting for a single candidate.

A candidate with the majority of the first-place votes — 50 per cent plus one — would win. If nobody meets that target, the candidate with the fewest first-place votes is knocked out. The second-place choices of that candidate's supporters are added to the totals of the remaining candidates and so on, until somebody has a majority.

No Canadian jurisdiction

currently uses ranked ballots. There are 444 municipalities in Ontario.

In Niagara Falls elections, the top eight vote getters for city councillor are elected to represent the entire city, as opposed to a ward system in which councillors are elected to represent different areas of the community.

Iorlida said it's conceivable under a ranked-ballot system in a three-way race for mayor, for example, the candidate with the most first-place votes could not win the election.

When the legislation was passed, St. Catharines city clerk Bonnie Nistic-Dunk immediately sent all available information off to the municipality's council and legal department.

She called it "way too soon" for the city to make any determination about whether a ranked ballot system would be a benefit locally.

St. Catharines voters cast ballots for candidates running in the ward in which they reside. There are six wards in the Golden City.

Nistic-Dunk said regulations must first be received from the lieutenant-governor outlining details of those changes before further review is done. However, there has been no indication of when that information will be provided.

Until that time, she felt it premature to further comment.

Regional clerk Ralph Walton was also awaiting the framework and details for ranked ballot elections.

"When they come out, we'll have to carefully review them," he said, adding he was "reluctant" to comment further on what the changes could mean until the legislation and regulations are examined.

In Welland, a meeting will be held with staff sometime in the next month to discuss the legislative changes and options for proceeding, acting city clerk Tara Stephens said.

A report to council will follow, she said, adding she was unable to comment fur-

ther until that time.

Brock University political science professor David Siegel is in favour of the ranked ballot system.

He feels it will help to eliminate "strategic voting," similar to what "potentially went on in the last federal election," and will give voters a sense of added value to each ballot.

"People will have a sense that if I don't vote for the winning candidate, my vote is not totally lost. My vote for second or even third choice is going to count in some way," he said.

Siegel also believes a ranked system will have another, more subtle impact.

"It could change the tone of campaigning."

Candidates will have to be weary that even if they are not the first choice of residents, they may be able to sway them as a close second preference, he said.

"That might introduce a certain amount of civility. You will want to explain why you're a better candidate than the others, but you don't want to attack the other candidates in such a vicious way that you totally turn off their supporters. You'd like to be the second choice of their supporters."

The provincial government said the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016, which reforms the Municipal Elections Act, will increase transparency and accountability.

It will make campaign finance rules clearer and easier to follow for voters, candidates and contributors, and ban corporate and union contributions to candidates.

A framework will be created to regulate third-party advertising, including contribution and spending limits, and define third-party advertising as advertisements supporting or opposing a candidate.

The length of campaigns will be shortened by opening nominations for candidates on May 1 instead of Jan. 1.

Continued on next page

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# Niagara reacts to coming municipal election changes

## From previous page

Municipal clerks will be required to prepare a plan regarding the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that could affect electors and candidates with disabilities, and make it easier to add or change certain information on the voters' list.

The legislation comes after a public review of the Municipal Elections Act was done between May and July 2015. The changes are based on input from across Ontario, including more than 3,400 submissions from the public, municipal councils and staff.

Lorifida said he was "literally floored" by how much the province shortened the length of the nominating period. "From a nine-month nomination period now to a three-month nomination period. That's quite radical," said Lorifida, adding candidates can start raising money immediately after filing their papers.

From a clerk's perspective, I think that's great for us because it allows us to maybe concentrate on certain aspects of the election at the appropriate times, as opposed to dealing with everything over a nine-month period.

"But I think it might be problematic for candidates. Does the three-month

period make that more difficult, especially in a larger municipality?"

He said it doesn't appear the province has changed voting day, which is scheduled for Oct. 22, 2018.

Lorifida said he thinks it's "just ridiculous" that candidates will now have to get 25 signatures prior to their nominations being accepted.

"Am I going to have to scrutinize those 25 signatures? Those 25 signatures have to be eligible electors within the community," he said.

"Not only will we have to scrutinize that, but then that will have their opponents scrutinizing those names and saying, 'Hey, I don't think five of those 25 signatures were legit.' To me, that just puts up a roadblock for running."

Lorifida said he's glad the province introduced the changes well before the next election.

"That gives us a lot of time to be trained and to educate ourselves on the changes."

He said staff will likely present an information report to council within the next six months.

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# LOCAL NEWS



DOB THYMECZYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Sgt. Josh Klopp of the Niagara Regional Police Service holds a LIDAR unit near the Welland Canals Parkway. Better than conventional radar guns, the LIDAR is one of the tools police use for speed enforcement.

## Police taking aim at speeders

**BILL SAWCHUK**  
Postmedia Network

With the summer driving season swinging into gear, the Niagara Regional Police are out in full force patrolling the roadways of Niagara.

One of the tools they are using is a LIDAR speed gun. While conventional radar guns are good, LIDAR is even better — unless you're the one with the lead foot.

"With LIDAR, we can pinpoint a vehicle up to one kilometre away," said Sgt. Josh Klopp, "though most of the enforcement with LIDAR occurs from about 300 metres."

"The officer looks through a scope, and it basically puts a red dot on the vehicle. When we pull the trigger, we can tell the speed and the distance that vehicle is travelling. Radar doesn't cover the same distance."

The main advantage of LIDAR is the size of the beam of light the gun emits.

It is small. From about 300 metres, the cone might be just one metre in diameter and allows the officer to target a specific vehicle.

It is also very accurate. The laser gun takes 1,000 samples per second and compares the change in distance between samples to calculate the speed of the vehicle. By taking several hundred samples in a fraction of a second, the accuracy of the reading is extremely high.

The NRP has been using the LIDAR, which stands for light detection and ranging, in speed enforcement for about five years.

And speed is the No. 1 killer on Niagara's roads, with impaired driving in second, and driver error (distracted driving) third.

Continued on next page

# LOCAL NEWS



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A Niagara Regional Police officer uses a LIDAR gun during speed enforcement in front of a school.

## The NRP is on the hunt for lead-footed drivers as temperatures heat up

From previous page

Two weeks ago, there were two serious crashes in Niagara. Speed was a factor in the first. Distracted driving was a factor in the second.

Police in Welland rushed to the scene after a 32-year-old Port Colborne man crashed his 2013 Ram pickup truck on May Road at 2:45 a.m. on June 3. The truck crossed the centre line and briefly left the roadway before being over-corrected.

The vehicle hit the ditch and rolled numerous times. The driver, who was alone, was ejected from the truck, suffering serious injuries. The police report said speed was a contributing factor in the seriousness of the injuries sustained by the driver.

Two days before that, on June 1 at about 5:20 p.m. there was a crash between a motorcycle and a car on Merrittville Highway at Port Robinson Road in Thorold.

A 60-year-old Port Colborne man was driving his 2016 Harley-Davidson motorcycle south on Merrittville Highway. At the same time, a 62-year-old Welland man driving a 2009 Chevrolet Impala on Port Robinson Road attempted to cross the highway after stopping at the intersection.

The Chevrolet collided with the Harley-Davidson. The rider was thrown from the motorcycle and landed on a lawn near the intersection. He was airlifted to hospital with serious injuries.

"When the nicer weather comes, people tend to start driving a little bit faster, and there are more motorcyclists, pedes-

### CAN YOU BEAT A SPEED TRAP?

There are a lot of hair-brained ideas out there about how to defeat a police radar gun. According to Snopes.com, which bills itself as the most comprehensive urban legend resource on the Internet, none of them work.

The theories include:

- Hanging a compact disc from your car's rearview mirror
- Stashing balls of tinfoil in your hubcaps or wrapping the hubcaps themselves in tinfoil
- Attaching strips of tinfoil to your antenna
- Applying mylar strips to your licence plate
- Spraying your licence plate with hairspray.

The theory, according to Snopes, is that they will scramble or deflect the signal aimed at the vehicle.

"In reality, none of it works," the website says. "The speed of tinfoiled, CD'd and mylar'd cars is just as easily read by the radar gun as that of less-tricked-out rides."

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## LOCAL NEWS



JULIE JOCSAK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Lourdes Hernandez and her daughter Julissa Hernandez-Waite are photographed at the launch of the McMaster Children's Hospital Pediatric Complex Care Clinic at Niagara Children's Centre in St. Catharines.

### A Niagara clinic for kids with complex health needs

**DON FRASER**  
Postmedia Network

Julissa Hernandez-Waite had a challenging early life. It was one that required a clinical team — and her family — to go the distance.

Julissa, 4, was born at McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton with organs formed outside her abdominal wall.

There, she spent eight months as doctors dealt with procedures that included a tracheotomy, ventilator and a feeding tube.

Eventually, she made it back home to her loving St. Catharines family.

Periodic checkups and procedures in Hamilton required arduous family trips — loaded with medical and family gear.

At first they were able to use a bus to get to the site. When direct transit service

ended about two years ago, they had to use a taxi for the visits. It cost almost \$200 per round trip.

"At the beginning it was at least twice a month," Julissa's mother Lourdes Hernandez said in an interview. "When we were busing it, it wasn't that bad, but when we had to taxi, it was very expensive."

Late last year, the family got some welcome relief from the difficult, pricey trips.

This, after McMaster Children's Hospital and Niagara Children's Centre joined forces to create new local clinic for Niagara children and their families facing complex medical conditions.

A media event to mark the new clinic was held last Wednesday at the Glenridge Avenue centre.

Continued on Page 21

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Mental health workers partner with police

From Page 9

"The people we are dealing with on these calls don't belong in a jail cell or the back of a police car in handcuffs. In some cases, they do need to go to the hospital, but it is better when that is the last resort."

Const. Dan Dupuis is a seven-year veteran and had already taken crisis intervention training before the program started. He jumped at the chance to participate

when the staff sergeant was looking for volunteers.

"It's just like riding with anybody else, you have to get along," Dupuis said. "We have hired good people. The officer has the final call on whether someone needs to be apprehended for their safety or the safety of the community — but I'm completely open minded about it. We work together to make the decision."

"If it is appropriate, we

can find another option that will work out better for them."

Police services board chairman Bob Gale was skeptical about the program when it started and said he would defer to the chief on it.

"The chief says it is working, and the officers on the street are finding it a valuable asset," he said. "If it is working, that's great. The police board always has to

weigh the cost of any program we run."

Mayor Walter Sendzik went out of his way to praise the teams.

Their efforts fit in perfectly with his Compassionate City initiative to make St. Catharines a kinder gentler place.

"Pairing an officer with a mental health worker creates a learning environment where they can better interact with vulnerable people,"

he said. "Everyone benefits. The city benefits. The Niagara Regional Police benefit. The people benefit. 'At the centre of it is the person who is in a challenging situation. That's the focus, and that is part of the Compassionate City project."

"Programs like this make a difference, and if we can weave them all together, we can accomplish something special here in St. Catharines."

One thing Dupuis learned was that a little knowledge can go a long way.

It may be as simple as identifying the difference between self-harming behaviours — such as a teen cutting her arm repeatedly — and behaviours that are life-threatening and require hospitalization.

"If it is a 911 call, it is a significant crisis," Falconer said. "In the past, if somebody had said, 'I'm going to kill myself,' the police would have said, 'Get in the cruiser; you are coming with me.'"

"Now, they are saying, 'Tell me about that' — and they

can start an assessment."

"They find out the person doesn't really want to kill themselves. They just want the pain to stop."

"They find ways to help them get what they want so suicide isn't the only option — and the person starts thinking about living and what they are going to do next instead of suicide."

Sand said one of her most gratifying moments came when she was talking to a hard-boiled, old-school officer.

"He said because of what he has learned, he was able to leave a 13-year-old girl at home, in good hands, with her family. After getting all the facts, the girl didn't need to be apprehended."

"She needed someone to listen to her. He left her at home, and her mom was going to follow up with Pathstone."

"When I heard that, I knew we were making progress. That's why we're here. To get the best outcome we can for people in crisis."

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# LOCAL NEWS



JULIE JOCSAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Breton Waite, Lourdes Hernandez and their children Julissa Hernandez-Waite and Elijah Hernandez-Waite attend the launch of the McMaster Children's Hospital Pediatric Complex Care Clinic. Waite and Hernandez accessed the centre for their four-year-old daughter.

## A Niagara clinic for kids with complex health needs

From Page 18

Niagara's Centre provides service to children and youth with physical, developmental and communicative delays, with many of them also patients at McMaster.

The McMaster Children's Hospital's Pediatric Complex Care Clinic provides care for children with multiple health needs, and who may need advanced technology.

To help improve accessibility, last fall, an agreement was hammered out to have the hospital's complex-care team to the centre once a month to see families who'd previously had to make the trip to Hamilton.

"This is less time consuming, there is better access," Hernandez said. "It's just knowing that basically wherever you are in the city, it will take you less than half an hour to get here."

At the media event, Hernandez also spoke with emotion about her daughter's progress.

"We've definitely feel blessed in having the team we had," she told the room.

"And we were able to look after her and to have us taught how to take care of her, too."

"This is a great idea, to help other families in similar situations."

Ten Niagara families are using the new clinic, with that number expected to grow.

"This has been a commitment of very like-minded organizations," said Oksana Fisher, chief executive officer of Niagara Children's Centre, who also spoke at the event. "And we really share a common commitment for family-centred care, and quality care for children and families that we serve."

"Here, we can have everybody there, with the family ... (we can do) planning, problem solving and it's all in real time," Fisher said.

"That can only improve care ... and the quality of life for the children and their families."

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Details emerge of Uber regulations

**BILL SAWCHUK**  
Postmedia Network

The Niagara police services board's new regulations to deal with ride-hailing giant Uber and the taxi industry are starting to take shape.

The board's licensing committee received a confidential report from its solicitor and is moving toward enacting a new bylaw at its next full meeting June 23.

"We could change this down the road," said board chair Bob Gale. "We are moving forward, but there are a lot of different opinions on this within the board itself."

"To say we are having a debate is an understatement. There is a lot of back and forth, and we are leaving the option open to change things down the way. We know we

can't keep everybody happy.

"We have had letters from politicians all over the region about this. MPP Tim Hudak sent a letter. Everybody is adding their two bits. We have also received some letters that were irate, but I don't want to go into that right now."

Uber has been operating illegally in Niagara since November, and 20 Uber drivers were charged with offences under the Highway Traffic Act back in April.

The police board released some of the details of the draft



**BOB GALE**

bylaw after its committee meetings last Thursday.

Uber is referred to as a transportation network company — TNC for short — throughout the proposed regulations.

The new rules will be contingent on all TNC drivers and vehicles having their insurance plan approved by the province, Gale said.

The province is in the process of reviewing Uber's liability policies. That analysis is expected early in July.

Among Niagara's new regulations are the following:

TNC drivers would have to undergo background checks and vehicle safety requirements identical to those applied to taxi drivers and taxi cabs.

There would be no quotas on

TNC drivers or vehicles.

There would be minimum fare restrictions of \$3.75 per trip for TNC-arranged rides.

TNC vehicles would be required to have identification as a TNC vehicle, and the vehicles would be subject to extensive record maintenance and production requirements.

The licensing fees charged to TNCs would include a flat fee, and a per trip charge, all with a view of making the administration and enforcement of the provisions operate on a cost-recovery basis.

In addition, there are some changes which the licensing committee has recommended for the existing taxi industry.

They include the maintenance of taxi cab quotas, with the provision that the issue

of quotas is to be reviewed in one year.

Taxi licences, although granted on a per area municipality basis, may be able to be used regionwide.

The goal of the police board remains to have the bylaw take effect July 1.

Hani Patni, CEO of Conventry Connections, one of the main players in the Niagara taxi industry, said he appreciated the time and effort the police board has given to carefully review and assess its bylaws.

"It is clear that the Region is addressing issues related to safety and insurance and ensuring adequate consumer protection and preventing nuisances," Patni said. "We hope the board carefully monitors service levels of all trans-

portation companies and provides adequate enforcement where appropriate."

Efforts to reach an Uber spokesperson were not successful by deadline.

The board has said the overriding objective of the new regulations in Niagara will be to promote public safety and consumer protection by ensuring drivers and vehicles in both industries are safe and adequately insured.

Niagara's police board is responsible for bylaws that regulate business operators and drivers of various vehicles-for-hire, such as cabs, tow trucks, limousines, sightseeing and shuttle vehicles, as well as horse-drawn buggies.

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# Risky sales put retailers in tough spot

ANDREA TINGEY  
Postmedia Network

An employee at a Pen Centre store lost their job last weekend for selling more than \$1,100 worth of cosmetics to a person with autism.

But for a salesperson faced with a possibly developmentally disabled customer looking to make a large purchase, there is no safe, clear option,

says a St. Catharines lawyer.

Refusing to make the sale can be just as risky as making it.

"The manager would have to decide whether or not to sell the product to the customer," said Mike Vanoostveen, of Sullivan Mahoney in St. Catharines.

"There is no sort of hard and fast rule you could apply to these situations. Particularly

with autistic people, there is a wide spectrum of ability."

Refusing to sell the product can be just as bad, "that's where you can get into trouble with discrimination."

After a Facebook post regarding the sale by Adore Cosmetics of more than \$1,100 in merchandise to an autistic man named Thomas went viral last weekend, many people accused the store of

taking advantage of him.

The store and the mall both later apologized, a refund was issued and Adore, through its headquarters in Miami, Fla., announced the employee who made the sale had been terminated.

Tuesday, Thomas's mother, who did not want to be identified to protect her son, revealed he had actually spent \$2,500 in cosmetics over the

course of three separate purchases made at Adore on the same day.

She learned that after reviewing his credit card statement.

"We don't want people to be discriminated against when they want to make a purchase," she said, "but in this case it seems kind of excessive."

The store, Adore Cosmetics,

is independently owned and operated.

The company is cancelling the payments issued to Tom's card.

In a statement, Adore corporate headquarters said "this kind of behaviour is completely unacceptable and directly violates our policies as far as customer service."

Continued on next page

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Case of customer with autism shows difficult choices they face

### From previous page

Speaking generally and not to this particular incident, Vanoostveen said there are legalities businesses must consider when employees consider selling product to people on the autism spectrum.

But other than consulting management, there is not much a person can do, as privacy laws prohibit asking personal questions.

"People are entitled to their privacy, so you can't go asking them a lot of prob-

ing questions."

The No. 1 rule, Vanoostveen said, is respect.

"Whether treating people with respect is selling something that they probably shouldn't be buying or denying them service, either way there are positives and negatives," he said.

"You don't want to take advantage of people."

He added in this instance, the customer was probably not making a decision in his own right. "Their whole business

model, stores like that, is to try and make the sale and sell as much as possible," said Vanoostveen.

"They're sort of setting themselves up to be in these bad situations. It's not like the guy just wandered into the store by accident, he was compelled or drawn in by their sales pitch, which is its own moral dilemma."

When Tom's parents initially tried to contact the store, they said they were denied a refund.

Vanoostveen said a store

cannot deny someone a refund without reason. "The store can't just say we're not refunding this under any circumstances," he said, noting it may be against the Consumer Protection Act.

"They can't make a blanket denial like that."

Autism Ontario's Niagara volunteer co-ordinator Jordan Shaw said situations should be handled on a case-by-case basis.

However, she said she believes families can do

things to prevent their vulnerable loved ones.

"If the child is at a place on the spectrum where they are able to go shopping on their own, it's important for the family to sit down and chat with them about it," she said.

"There are risks associated with it. We don't want anyone else to get hamboozled, for lack of a better word." Thomas's mother agreed education is key.

"We certainly have to work on education from our

end," she said.

"We've also spoken to the autism society, and my husband is going to be at a meeting there (Tuesday) night, and we're going to encourage them to have some workshops about this kind of financial education."



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